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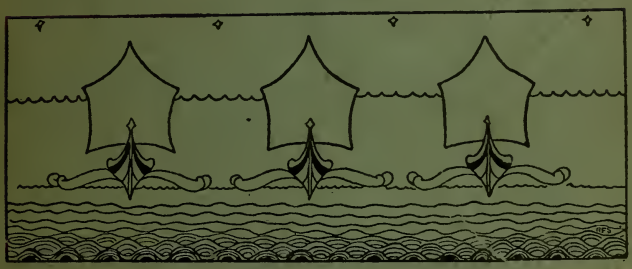
THE WIND OVER THE WATER



PHILIP MERIVALE

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THE WIND OVER THE WATER

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THE WIND OVER THE WATER

BY

PHILIP MERIVALE

"L'oubli total est sans gravité;
Mais l'oubli partiel est perfide."

Boston
The Four Seas Company
1920

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SEP 8 1921

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The Four Seas Company

FEB 23 1921

TO MY WIFE

. . . it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless impotence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words, howe'er uncouth.

JAMES THOMSON.

PERSONS

THORA
OLAF
GYDA
CORMAR
THE ANGEL OF GOD

The scene of the play is laid in Iceland in the 12th century A. D.

THE WIND OVER THE WATER

The interior of CORMAR'S *house. It is built of pine and walled with smooth planks. Curtains of skin hang over the window which is towards the right in the back wall, and over the door which is in the middle of that wall. Between the window and the door, at the height of a man's head, is hung a great target of white bull's hide studded with a copper hilt. By the right hand wall of the house is the hearth, on which a fire is glowing in good embers. The room is without any designed ornament, but is made beautiful by the incidental shapeliness of the common implements such as the spinning wheel with its little carved pine-cones, a shepherd's staff with a hook of copper, a fishing spear, two or three odd oars and the woman's copper cooking-utensils. Above the hearth, under the window lies a heavy pile of skins for a bed. The chairs and table are all of white pine and very heavy.* THORA *is seated by the fire spinning, and* OLAF *is on the floor watching her steadfastly, while* GYDA, *his sister, is standing in the window, gazing out through the half-withdrawn curtain at the snow; for on this early spring evening the snow is coming down heavily.*

OLAF

Now stay your wheel. You'll dim your eyes with watching it
In this half-light. You promised us at dusk
You would lay it by when it grew dark.

THORA

Is it dark?

OLAF

Look! I will keep the fire-light from your eyes:
Now turn and see how dark it is grown since first
We all fell silent.

THORA

Set it yonder then.

[*He takes the wheel over to the other end of the room, beyond the table.*]

I did not think we had so long kept silence.

OLAF

One might suspect you had a thing to hide
So busily o'er the wheel you bent your head.
Now, Gyda, sit you down, and I will tell
A tale to gladden you in the red gloom.

GYDA

[*Turning from the window.*]

Are you not weary, Thora? Let us go.

THORA

Stay a while with me yet. I am alone.
I'll light the lamp.

[GYDA *returns to her watch at the window.*]

OLAF

Nay, let us have the dusk. . . .
Now Olaf's widow, Aud, the queen, set sail
With many a red-haired Gaedhil from the Western
Isles
And came to Hoy—

THORA

Why will you tell me stories
Of sea-worn islanders? Are there none beside
For you to mock at, for their griefs or colour?

OLAF

I mock them not. I tell you how they met
And drave aground the Danish ships, and bore
Much gear away, and every man a mate
To bear him seed in the new land they sought.

THORA

You know I come of that same seed. You make
Laughter so easily out of grievous things.
Why do you say you love me?

OLAF

I had thought
To make you proud and merry with a tale
Of the great Gaedhil that came with Aud whom she
Loved—the fair queen, and slew for her love's sake
Because his blue eyes wandered from her face
And dwelt more lovingly—

THORA

Oh! tell not me
Of the red Gaedhils! Had the sea swallowed them

And frozen up their blue eyes and made weed
Of their red hair there had been rest for us.

OLAF

You would not have been born; and all my dreams
Had been the formless and dull shadow of life:
But now they are a sharp and glittering sword
Forged and shaped out and tempered by my thought
Of you.

THORA

You must not dream. You must ungird
This sword, for fear its edge be turned on you.

OLAF

Gyda hath said the same! And they all say
That I am a fool. They call me by his name, him
Who dreamed of meanings in the stars and moon
And saw in the sheaves interpretable signs.
They mock me for a fool that's not content
With the laborious day, but seeketh stuff
To spin and weave and labour over in sleep.

THORA

You must not fashion armour for yourself
Lest being a most unskilful smith you leave
A crevice for the arrows to find out,
Or it be found too heavy for your limbs
And on a day betray you to the foe.

OLAF

I could not live if I should tear from me
The half-wrought web I am weaving. Do *you* bid me
Cast it aside?

THORA

Yes, for I love you well.
You are gentle and in my trouble comfort me.
But for your own sake I would have you change.
Grow hard to men and women, and your heart
Will become strong and feel no pain itself.

OLAF

Do you say that? Whence are your sorrows then
If only out of visions grief be born?
Your eyes are not yet visionless, albeit
You bid me shut mine out. Nay, you yourself
That give this counsel are a vision dreamed,
Dwelt on by sad, impatient souls at night.
My spirit is the tremulous sea that lies
Under the spell of the oft-changing Moon.

THORA

I am older, and I know you will find out
Some hidden thing within the Moon's heart laid
That shall dispel the enchantment she holds now,
And darken you with anger and reproach.

OLAF

You are not older than the soul in me.
The ignorant sea, which is so old, remains
Enchanted still; and so must men abide
For ever under the spell of woman's love,
Although she seek herself to lift the veil.

GYDA

[*Coming down to them*]

Come, let us go.

OLAF

Give me your hand to kiss.

[*She gives him both hands.*]

You are no queen with soft delightful hands
That have wrought nothing but old songs in silk.
These are slave's hands. They shall be a sign
Like His, who died the slave's death long ago,
The sign and witness of the Truth.

GYDA

Come now.
Let us go home. The snow is over, and all
The earth is sheeted.

OLAF

[*At the window.*]

Why, what night is this
That the stars should seem mystical anew
And the Earth with a new silver spell enchanted?
It is a gleaming mirror just unveiled
That has been curtained many years, a pool
We have found the first time on a familiar road.
[*He goes to the door, opens it and stands outside.*]
What saint's night is it?

THORA

[*Unconsciously speaking aloud, but so that only* GYDA *hears.*]

It is my wedding-night.
I have been ten years married.

GYDA

Little friend,
I can well see for what white sacrament
God spread the world to-night.

THORA

[*Hysterically.*]

And I have bought
Wine, look you!

GYDA

Kiss me. You are beautiful.

THORA

Nay, I am pale and careful-eyed.

GYDA

I'll ask
Cormar—

THORA

Nay, vex him not with talk of me.

GYDA

Vex him?

THORA

Ah yes, he deems me fair enough.
You would do wrong to think him careless of me.
He loves me well. But then ten years will work
A change—do you not think it must—some change?—
In any woman, fair though she may be.
And if you mark it not, yet he will see it
Who hath kept that beauty in his house so long.
It is a golden bowl from which he hath drunk
So oft that he forgets how fair it is;
For beauty will become common and stale
Unto the eye that hath been long close to it.
I have been ten years learning this.

GYDA

Ten years!
A thousand shall not mar your loveliness.
That is eternal by the influences
Of great deeds by the songs men sing of them.

THORA

Ten years is long.

[GYDA *takes her hands.*]

GYDA

Where got you this new ring?

THORA

Why, Cormar found it lying yesterday
In the black furrow, and gave it me to-day.
No—do not take it.

[*She withdraws her hand and puts it in her bosom.*]

GYDA

There is writing on it.

THORA

We do not know the tongue.

OLAF

[*Without.*]

Oh! I can see
All manner of signs in heaven. There is a new
Message—I know not what, but the dark pines
Stretch silver heads up on their great black stems,
The pines are heroes come out of long ships
From a far country to a stranger land,
And stretching up their silvery shields to heaven
They shout to awake the sleepy, sorrowing world.

GYDA

[*To Thora.*]

Do you not know the burthen?

THORA

Cormar says
The character is strange even to the priest,
Who said it was a heathen ornament
With an idolatrous prayer. And I am afraid,
Lest in it indeed a mystery be
Most perilous, a spell perhaps to plague
The folk on earth for ever.

OLAF

[*Without.*]

The bent Moon
Is like a flail swung in the grasp of God.
And from His threshing-floor the scattered stars
Leap, and are winnowed out by the four winds.
And unto us the grain He measureth
That we may fill our bosoms and have bread
For evermore.

GYDA

The moonlight crazes him.
We will go home.

THORA

The road is bright for you.

[GYDA *goes out and joins* OLAF*; the two can be seen passing the window together, against the snow.* THORA *follows to the door and stands looking after them.*]

I hoped he would come earlier in to-night,
This night, I thought, if he remembered it:
At least to-night. I should not ask another,
Since it is lonely here for him. The snow
Perhaps,—ay, it is deep: that hath delayed him.
He will be wet up to the thighs no doubt.
I'll make the fire up brighter.

[*She shuts the door and draws the curtain over the window, and carries logs to the hearth.*]

How the ring
Cuts round my finger when I lift the logs.
They are heavy; but this other cuts me not
Like the new copper thing.

[*She examines it.*]

If I but knew
The rune that's written on it

[*She begins to prepare supper.*]

I would now
Use it to change the manner of my days,
To make his recollection dear, perhaps
Recover something of the beauty I left
In long, unvisited corners of our life.

[*By this time she has set broth to boil on the hearth, and laid out bread on the table.*]

But I must hide the wine. I'll bring it out
For a surprise to please him. There it's best.

[*She hides it after some hesitation behind the spinning-wheel in the far corner of the room.*]

He would not look for wine to come from there.
I wonder if I prayed when I bought that!
Deep in my heart it may be, and unknown
To my own thought. Would God hear pray'rs like that?
What bounty is in wine that we should drink it
At God's guest-table? I'll ask Olaf this.
But if it kindle in Cormar that old love,
Like twain that go back hand in hand, we two
Shall wander over the ways we have trod so far,
And heal with visionary steps the wounds
We had in walking down the sad long years.

[*She has been busy still, but now pauses with her hands empty, leaning on the table.*]

But he'll not come with me.

CORMAR

[*Without.*]

Thora! A-Ah!

[*He gives a familiar call.*]

THORA

[*Returning the cry.*]

A—Ah! I am coming, Cormar.

[*She hastens to open the door; he is standing, with the horses' bridles in his hand, a great fair man with red hair and beard.*]

What has happened?
How late you are!

CORMAR

It is not midnight yet.
Bring me a rush-light out: the stable-lantern
Is empty, and the wick has smouldered away.

THORA

I think there are no rush-lights.

CORMAR

Let me look.

[*He pushes past her, without violence, but carelessly, into the room. She takes his place at the horses' heads.*]

Did you not go to-day to market?

THORA

Yes.

CORMAR

[*After searching the room.*]

Is there no oil at least?

THORA

[*Impatiently at last.*]

Why did not you
Bethink yourself to get it?—Could not you
For once remember? Must I think and do
Everything, that you may be free to do
Nothing?

CORMAR

[*Tranquilly.*]

I'll house them in the dark then.

[*He goes towards the door.*]

THORA

Cormar, Cormar!

CORMAR

They are steaming in the cold.

THORA

I am sorry, Cormar.

You are so patient.

CORMAR

Nay, now, do not weep.

THORA

But you have not remembered—

CORMAR

What?

THORA

To-day—

Our wedding-day.

CORMAR

This snow will ruin all!

Who sends the snow in spring?

THORA

Ah, Cormar!

CORMAR

Why,
It is as cold as any winter's night.

THORA

You do not hear me.

CORMAR

Why will you speak of it?
'Tis idle to remember a day dead.

THORA

How is it dead? I did not let it die.
Who slew it then?

CORMAR

Why it is past and we
Shall come not on it in our way to death.
Why would you fix it in your mind, to weep
When it comes round, a ghost, a shadow, a dream,
A lying beggar that prevails on you
With his foot-weariness to help him live?

THORA

Do I look now as then I was?

CORMAR

I'll go
And put the horses in. While I am gone
Make supper ready.

THORA

Yes, you have forgotten.
Will you speak out and say you are weary of me?

CORMAR

I will speak out the truth. I know not how
We are come to this: why you that are beautiful
Should fail me now, that were sufficient once.
I caught you up, a laughing girl, a spirit,
Ay, in mid-laughter and defiant joy
Took you, in proud and scornful maidenhood,
That you should learn humility and grief,
A woman's portion being grown,—and man's.
And you came with me into the long ship
And many days sailed the unstable sea,
Watching the light foam and the swollen wave,
And wide-spread wings of the free albatross.
Then we were joyous, we were free as they.
It was the season in our hearts, no more.
Then were none like us: amid the armed
And bearded warriors I stood like a king,
And you were peerless among women-folk.

THORA

Ah! You remember all.

CORMAR

It is remembrance
That saps the strength of all intent to come,
And makes us doubtful in our purposes.
Remembrance and regret are man and wife,
And much I fear God can not sever them.
Dry your eyes; we are weary both.

THORA

Nay, I am not
Crying.

CORMAR

Come, that is well then.

THORA

[*Shyly.*]

Cormar, I bought
This, in the morning.

[*She brings out the wine.*]

It is southern wine
Brought hither in the foreign ship, and richer
Than our own vintages.

CORMAR

Why, if our land
Will bear us only wheat we may rejoice.
But this year is a poor one, and I fear
The eaters of the grass alone will reap.
You had done better to have bought the oil.

THORA

Yes.

CORMAR

Now I must make haste.

THORA

But you'll not go
In darkness? Take out this lamp in your hand.

CORMAR

Will you not fear to sit alone in the dark?

THORA

The fire is bright enough: you'll not be far:
And you more need the light than I do, Cormar.

CORMAR

[*Taking the lamp.*]

I had the horses rough-shod in the morning.

[*Going out.*]

Now get your supper ready.

THORA

He hath said

I am beautiful. He does not say I am old.
He does not turn from me because I am grey.
There is some stronger thing at work than Time,
Deeper than change which passeth over us.

[*A figure coming into sight from the left looks in at the window for an instant and returns to the left again.*]

I am amazed because there is nothing here
I can perceive to alter or remove,
Naught that might seem to anger him, and naught
That is desirable to him.

[*There is a knock at the door.*]

Who knocks?
Was it within myself? Can one approach
So stealthily, and mingle with the thought
That's deepest buried in another's soul?

[*The knocking is repeated. She opens the door and discovers a woman standing there, dressed in rich, white raiment. It is an* Angel of God *in the likeness of a woman.*]

Angel

You have been long, but now you will let me in.

Thora

What leads you hither, wandering at this hour?

Angel

Will you not let me in?

Thora

Yes, do not stand
In the cold, doubtfully. Come by the fire.

[*She brings her in.*]

Angel

[*Sitting by the fire.*]

How warm your hearth is! Why do you sit alone
Without a lamp?

Thora

The fire is good: it gives
Light enough for my purpose, and my husband
Will bring me back the lamp in a little while.

Angel

Hath he taken the light from you?

THORA

Nay of myself
I gave it to him: there are so many ways
That men have need of light more than we women.
You see I can make his supper and prepare
His bed in a half-light: I need no more.
Here's milk and bread.

ANGEL

Is it not his?

THORA

There's more.
But though I would spare nothing of my own
I have set by wine for him, and of that wine
I dare not give you. Yet drink this, I pray you!—
I am not inhospitable.

[*She kneels and stirs the fire.*]

ANGEL

Do you not
Wonder who I may be.

THORA

Oft in the snow
A stranger that has lost the road will knock
And stay with us till morning.

ANGEL

Let me stay.

THORA

[*Rising and looking towards the door.*]
I know not how to answer you: it is late,

And the snow's deep: and yet to-night—to-night
Is not as other nights, but set apart
From all the other nights in the long year.
But if you had come to-morrow—or yesterday!—

ANGEL

I could not choose but journey on this day:
I have been but three days in the land.

THORA

You came
In the strange ship out of the south, it may be?

ANGEL

It is so. What is this night?

THORA

I'd not fill
Your ears with mine own story. This is all,
It is my wedding night:—only ten years—
I'll set it down.

[*She takes the bowl from her.*]

ANGEL

That is a heavy ring.

THORA

[*Letting her examine it.*]

My husband gave it me.

ANGEL

That is my ring.
I lost it in the fields, two days ago.

THORA

When were you in our fields?

ANGEL

The day we landed.

THORA

My husband found it in the furrow, and gave it
To me.

ANGEL

It is my ring, and here is writ—
ἰδοὺ, καινὰ πάντα ποιῶ

THORA

Can you decipher it? It is some charm
That wedded with the mystic power of rings
Will bind and keep the soul? Is it not a charm?

ANGEL

It is to set the imprisoned spirit free.

THORA

What should that signify?

ANGEL

It is the day
To hear it and take comfort in the truth—
"Lo, I make all things new!"

THORA

Give it me back.
There can be no change in eternity.
No ring can bear a legend that cries out
"Change"! But to marriage and eternal love
And fellowship the ring exhorteth us.

ANGEL

Even as this other, that bears no legend?

THORA

Yes, yes! Ah! give it me! He loves me well!
He is a man, and there be many needs
In which I am comfortless and of no help
To him. But this you read, he would but scorn.
Give it me back.

ANGEL

[*Taking her outsteretched hand.*]

Why, it has worn a mark
Already on your finger—in two days.
How should you wear it for ten years?

THORA

As this
I have worn ten years, and yet it chafes me not.
My finger is not red, but clear and white
Beneath it.

ANGEL

And your soul?

THORA

Do you not think
I left my mother's house with something learned
Of her, and something of my self divined,
That in my own house should be laid on me
A greater burden than my maiden tasks?

ANGEL

You have no children.

THORA

Yet without them, life
Is full of cares and no light holiday.
I am content to live so.

ANGEL

You have tears
In your eyes even now.

THORA

May I not weep
Without a cause? I am often left alone,
And so imagine cause for grief. I have lost
A way of looking up under the eyes,
Or a girl's trick of throwing back the head—
Something I shall recover—oh! be sure!
And so my husband leaves me alone some while.
It is but that he feels yet young, I know,
That he forgets I am older now than he.
But one day he'll remember and be turned
To look on me with reasonable eyes,
Who have grown old beside him. My hair's grey
Over the temples, but he is red.

ANGEL

No change
Upon your body hath struck him.

THORA

Whence are you?
What are you that blow on me like the wind
Which ruffles the still, solitary pool?
The water that was sad, and yet at peace,
You have stirred up.

ANGEL

Ere they be choked with weed
I stir the waters; for within their depth
Is healing for the sorrow of the world.

[*She gives him the ring.* CORMAR *re-enters with the lamp, so that the room grows light. He is covered with snow.*]

CORMAR

The snow is falling thick again.

THORA

Look, Cormar,
Here is a stranger whom I have taken in.

CORMAR

It is an ill night to be lost abroad.
She is welcome.

ANGEL

I am loth to trouble you,
So fit your dwelling seems for weary feet,
So warm your welcome.

CORMAR

There's none other near.

THORA

Save Olaf's.

CORMAR

Where hath he to lodge a stranger?
Or what save dreams to feast them on?

ANGEL

[*Rising.*]

I have
The master's seat. You are cold, and I am warm'd
Already.

CORMAR

Sit you still.

ANGEL

Nay, do you come.

[*He takes his chair, stretching his body before the blaze. She is very attentive to him, and he is flattered by her demeanour.*]

CORMAR

[*As* THORA *takes the broth from the fire.*]

Come, eat and drink with us!

THORA

Nay, she has supped.

CORMAR

Will you not sit with us at table?

ANGEL

Indeed

I am no longer hungry.

THORA

I have made

All ready for you, Cormar.

CORMAR

[*Rising.*]

I'll not press

Food on you, but you shall drink wine with us.
Bring the flask, Thora.

THORA

Will you—?

[*She breaks off and produces the flask.*]

CORMAR

It will keep
The blood warm in you through your sleep to-night,
There are three cups. Drink this.

[*He gives the Angel one.*]

It is good wine.
Why do you not drink, Thora?

THORA

I have lost
Desire to drink.

CORMAR

[*Turning to the Angel.*]

You are welcome to my house.

[*To Thora*]

I'll sleep to-night in the stable on the straw.

THORA

[*Aside to him.*]

She must not stay. I had thought to bid her stay
But cannot in my heart find welcome for her.

CORMAR

She can lie by your side.

THORA

But you —

CORMAR

What else?
We cannot push her from the door.

THORA

[*To him intimately*]

Because
You have forgotten, that is why you'll give
Your bed up to her. Ah! you do not think!
But if my yearning blood can claim you yet
You shall not sleep this night away from me.
Gyda has room and a free heart. From her
I shall find shelter for the stranger here.

CORMAR

Stay!

THORA

[*To the Angel.*]

I will find you shelter, friend, elsewhere.

CORMAR

I will not have it!

THORA

Ah! But this one night!

CORMAR

To-morrow and yesterday are as to-day.
Why do you linger over the memory
Of a death-bed ten years cold?

ANGEL

I would not take
The master's bed. If you will find me shelter,
I'll thank you for your pains.

THORA

Shall I do so,
Cormar?

CORMAR

[*Shortly.*]

Our guest desires it.

ANGEL

Think no shame,
Blame not yourself, as I do blame you not.
It is my choice.

THORA

I shall be back again
In an instant. Be not angry, Cormar, with me.

CORMAR

[*Suddenly kissing her.*]

Take that into the darkness with you, and come
Quickly again.

[*She goes out. To himself.*]

She hath my youth. I gave
A goodly gift to her, which makes her good.

ANGEL

What a pale cheek! How cold!

CORMAR

They of her race
Have fair, soft skins and are most chaste of blood.
But like sweet fruit in season they grow red
And are the sweeter for the rare delight.

[*He sits gloomily at the table and pours out wine, which he then forgets.*]

ANGEL

[*After an interval of silence*]

You did not look for snow again?

CORMAR

I look

For nothing.

ANGEL

But a careful husbandman

Will watch the sky.

CORMAR

I care not what befall.

ANGEL

Will not the snow kill the young seed?

CORMAR

It may be.

But I have sown no seed this year, and wait

No harvest.

ANGEL

Yet I saw you at the plough

But two days since.

CORMAR

Oh yes.

ANGEL

The day I lost

A ring of copper from my finger.

CORMAR

Yes.
Each year for ever I plough and break the earth up,
And turn the soil and turn it over again:
But I put down no seed and reap no harvest.

ANGEL

Why then do you still labour and lead out
In the bleak dawn your team, and come again
So late to rest? What make you in the fields?

CORMAR

Dreams, with mine idle hands on the plough-tail!
For bending so above the turned, wet Earth
I get from hence and mix with men of old,
And thus shake off the care hangs over the house,
The sharp regret for all my good years dead.

ANGEL

What profit have you of an unsown field?
What will you draw from earth to feed your life?

CORMAR

I know not: for last year my cattle strayed,
And on the hills were frozen: and my sheep
Perished in the like way. Now I have none.
Nor dare I venture out on the grey sea
Because my boat is rotten and the sail torn.
But there my heart is—out on the grey sea
With aching memory among the masts
That towered above the chiefs of Innisthore,
The lordly harvesters of the red grain.

With them of old I laboured from the coast
Of Innisfail to stormy Videroe,
From Ulster and Morven by the Hebrides
And even to the cities of the South
On sunny rivers—reaping, reaping, reaping
With that bright sickle you see over your head.
I was a man then. I was a king then. Now—

[*He stretches his great limbs.*]

ANGEL

You were a warrior in old days?

CORMAR

Ten years!
No more than ten years since. If now there be
A warrior living in those days from Sveyn
Of Orkney to the meanest—ask if this
Be truth, that I, Red Cormar was to men
A song in mine own time, as Fingal even,
Or Fergus on the strings of Carril's harp.
Ten years you would have thought could hardly sap
The marrow of a young giant.

ANGEL

Surely you
Were first among the seamen and the kings,
The royal fighters. Have you not been to-day,
Even this day, ten years married?

CORMAR

You know that!
She hath told you that? Why yes, I have been ten
years

Sapped and unstrung, womanish, feeble, old.
Yet have I taken a king by his full beard
And a king's son by his wavy yellow hair
And rolled away their crowns into my ship.
Would God they had slain me then! I am less a man
Than if I were ten years buried.

ANGEL

Are there not
Young lions and their whelps in the world to slay?
If you should lay your hands even in these days
To the red reaping-hook, are there not kings
That should desire your friendship?

CORMAR

Once indeed!
I know not if the old kings are living yet.
I have been buried an age, I think. It may be
They are all dead, or, living, are grown white
And tremble on their hams as they walk forth.

ANGEL

But you are young and your limbs fail not you.
Go down among the young men! Shew them all
The work of an elder as your work was done
In your day.

CORMAR

Nay. I am an old dog chained
To a kennel. I can go no further forth
Than the chain's length that holds me to my straw.

ANGEL

Will you be free? There is no man is bound
But by the woven cord of his invention.

You have devised this bondage that oppresseth you,
And you alone can break it, if you be
A man.

CORMAR

I am. There was none like me.

ANGEL

You can remember praise that covered you.
New praises can you by no means compel.
Will you already in your richest health
Shake by a fire, and count your old coin over?
What joy have you, what profit in remembrance?

CORMAR

A man there was of mighty limbs, a leader
Of many warriors in Helgoland,
When we went thither in our ships of old.

ANGEL

Ay, what of him to-day? Shall your sole heart
Retain what the earth loses and must lose?
Shall all things change about you in due course
And you abide?

CORMAR

He stood up on a rock
And drew our helmsman with his left hand out
Of the swinging, helpless ship, and held him high
Above the hissing surf, and, laughing, struck
The head from his body.

ANGEL

Ah-h—!—Then?

CORMAR

I leapt down
Into the wild deep water by the ram,
And swam under the gleaming copper keel
Up to his rock, and with torn feet and knees
Climbed, keeping still my shield over my head,
And mowed him at the ankles. Down he came!
His sword was a mower's scythe, but help'd him not
Against me: he had a spear two fathoms long,
And two men ever abode at his back to carry it!
But there it hangs that felled this forest king,

[*He takes his own sword from the wall.*]

This oak among the pines. I laid him low.
He had a collar of gold about his neck,
But this shore through it like a band of straw,
Of yellow straw that bindeth up the sheaves.
I hurled him clashing back among his friends,
And they that followed me, gleaned after me.
Such things I dream on in the black mid-field,
And therefore I dip in my hand no more
To fill it with the grain in sowing time.

[*He makes the sword sing.*]

ANGEL

Why, how you make the blade whistle and bite
Against the riven air!

CORMAR

For I am yet
Somewhere at heart a warrior and a king.

ANGEL

There be new galleys sighted in these waters.

CORMAR

Ha! What of them?

ANGEL

Set foot upon their decks
You are fixed upon your loins like a strong tower!
Your body is a turret whence men watch
And your long hair a banner to buoy up
The hopeful hearts of warriors.

CORMAR

I am yet
Young, you would say?

ANGEL

You are a king of men.

CORMAR

This target hath done service. Look! This hide
I stripped from a white bull ere I was grown,
A wild white bull of Britain. That long scar
It had of a Moor's scimitar in Spain.
Think you with this before, and in my hand
This, is there yet in me a word, a look,
A spirit for men to follow?

ANGEL

Surely yes:
And women would fall down and clasp your knees.

CORMAR

Well I remember launching the long ships
And pushing round the headlands of the rocks:
And outward then across the straits we went
Westward against the wet tempestuous winds,

And south to cities of the merchant folks.
And never came we home without good store
Of gold and copper and curious woven work,
And dark haired women whom we chose by lot.
After the sowing put we forth to sea,
And came again at harvest, and again
Put out, when all was stored, to catch the winds
Of Autumn till the snow-fall. So we put
The raiment of the seasons on our lives,
And with the months our beings moved.

But One
Hath brought us a new Heaven in His hand,
A birthright of intolerable days,
With promises to be redeemed at death,
No glory of alternating good and ill
Here in the flesh, of changing war and peace.
I think He knew not of a royal need.
His was no kingly heart that offered this.

ANGEL

Yours is a king's heart. Be a king and drive
These new invaders from your soul. Drive out
The enemy whose ships lie on your beach,
Launch forth and follow over the rich seas
And be not lost for a faint pilot's sake.
Take *you* the helm!

CORMAR

What are you that have shewn
My soul to me? What magic is in you,
Since from the depth of mine own thought you speak
The words my lips have uttered not.

ANGEL

I see
The spirit that is in you, and I speak
The words that tremble on all lips the world wide.
You are the trumpet at the mouth of Time:
I am the breath within the trumpet. We
Are soundless severally.

CORMAR

You alone
Have seen the god in me. By you I am crowned.
Follow me ever out across the world.

ANGEL

Lead me. I follow.

CORMAR

You are my strength, my soul!

[*He clasps her.*]

Ah! queenly soul! My lover! Oh! your eyes—
I cannot read the enchantment that doth haunt
Your eyes and draw on mine. For you have come
Out from some shrine where sits unuttered Truth
And your face glows with knowledge infinite.
Bring me, too, in to the dim place!

[*The lamp begins to flicker.*]

ANGEL

We are one.

Come, let us go amid the fields of kings.
But look not back in sorrow. Let us go.
It is the time to look, and know, and change,
Since truth is dead in the old signs, and light
Has faded from the lanterns lit of old.

CORMAR

[*With the sword in his right hand and his left arm through the buckler-straps.*]

I will tear off to-morrow from a king
A hornéd helmet, and with a thin keel
Slash out my name in foam across the sea.

[*They go out together, leaving the door wide: the lamp flickers again and goes out and the fire burns low. Presently voices are heard without and* THORA *re-enters with* GYDA. THORA *stands silent, taking in the truth at once, intuitively: but* GYDA *talks.*]

GYDA

There's no one here. Is it his custom, then,
To see all's well before he shuts the door?
It may be when he left her she was afraid
To sit alone in a strange house in the dark
And followed after him.

THORA

It is the truth.
I closed my eyelids and shut out the truth;
And now it fills my soul, the bitter weed,
The unsown truth that springeth up like grass,
And you come on it suddenly where it sprung
Ages before you saw it.

GYDA

What do you mean?

THORA

Who was it came here wandering to my house?
Was this a woman sat beside my fire?
Whom have I entertained?

GYDA

What do you say?

THORA

I would I were imperious, like a queen
Out of the old stories, that is girt with a sword!
Now had I laid my hand to the copper hilt:
I had smitten her, that her hair should have been shed down
Over my feet like water, and him there
I would have stretched above her, heart to heart
Married and dead.

GYDA

I see now. He is gone
But you must weep. Nay do not stand so still!
Weep here—here in my arms lest you go mad.

THORA

Why, if they brought him dead I should but weep:
I should bend over him and still with tears
Regret, regret, regret.

OLAF

[*Without.*]

How long you are!
My horses wait to draw you home again.
The eagle of the morning is aloft,
And spreads abroad his grey and golden wings
Above the hills, above the pines and sea.

[*He enters.*]

OLAF

[*To Gyda.*]

What is amiss?

GYDA

Cormar is gone.

OLAF

Is he dead?

GYDA

He is gone with the strange woman. She is alone.

THORA

I would the pines were growing over me,
Out of my heart, if that may quicken aught.

OLAF

Ah! flesh and spirit you have made quick in me.
I pray you, Thora, be not sorrowful.
I saw last night new symbols out of Heaven.
The old signs are empty of the Truth and hang
Against the sky like tempest-ruined oaks
That stand for landmarks when the bounds are changed.
They bind, not free thy soul. Upon your hands
Where the soft flesh is hardened hath been set
In these ten years the dreadful testament
Of woman's sacrifice in love to man.
Now of thine own act free thyself, as he
Is freed, and be not like the rest of women
Nailed for derision of the winds and all
Interminable spirits, to the bleak Cross,
The empty and antique symbol of the ring.

[*She starts and clutches the finger on which she wears the copper ring.*]

I'll take you hence.

GYDA

Thora!

OLAF

Ah hear me now.
I have five white horses harnessed in my wain.
I will not stay to deck their heads with plumes
Nor dress their manes, but let us go even now,
Even in the dawn, as verily out of night
Into the day your spirit shall advance.
And you'll forget the rest. Is there not hope?

GYDA

Truly he loves you. If Truth be as grass
Then is it sown as grass by the hand of God,
And not unsown because we sowed it not.
If this be God's will!

OLAF

For there must be change
Within Eternity. I have money and land,
And herds and flocks—but naught that is not yours—
No, not a dream that visiteth me at night
But seems mysteriously to proceed from you,
Thora.

GYDA

Here, sweet, at least were solace, here
Love and all gentleness, and it may be
Forgetfulness and a new past created.

THORA

But think you it is now a thousand years—
Have I among the dreamless folk been dead,
With them forgetful for a thousand years
Since I went to that other and gave him all?
I went to him in white, with my hair bound,
Bringing him boughs and blossom white upon them:
And I was proud with garlands in my hair;
And I was humble before him and gave all.
He set me up between his knees: he took

The fillet from my forehead, and unclasped
The bracelets from my arms, the silver rings,
And the white girdle from my waist drew off.
And all the bonds that did encircle me
And bind me to my childish life he broke.
And like a shaken branch that strews the earth
With beauty, fell my blossom over him.
And I was shed like dew upon his strength,
I came down like the dew that gladdens earth,
As a great tree whereon the rain is rained
And the vast limbs are freshed; so was my lord.
But now as the garment we are weary of
He hath changed me, and left me where he'll walk no more.
He hath left me in an unremembered room.
There is no kindness in him for my beauty,
No sweet remembrance of my beauty's gift.
And I am grey and fretful with remembrance.

OLAF

You are eternal!

THORA

This is the end of life,
The ceasing of my natural increase here,
Since time to come can grow not from the past
Nor meet it even across this chasméd day.

OLAF

The past is dreadful. Love, be born anew!

THORA

If I could die first.

OLAF

I will fill your life
With my youth, with my blood and with my dreams.

THORA

I can not take his arms from the thin girl
I have so often wept for. She would come
With eyes like these, upbraiding, full of tears,
And say "Why left you me alone with him
To take a new man?" Oh, the scarlet sun!
Would God ye'd bury me out of the light of it.

OLAF

Thora!

GYDA

Say nothing. Let her be alone.
Her soul hath memories we can never share.
We'll seek her out to-night.

[*She takes him away, stopping only to pull the curtain across the window, through which the morning sun is now streaming. The horse-bells jingle away into the distance.*]

THORA

My life is in the prison of a ring!
Why can not I change, if that Change be Law?
Lo! all things change, but change comes not to me!
The circles of the world have shut me out.

[CURTAIN.]

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